

A HIGH TIDE SHORE BIRD SANCTUARY IS SET UP OFF HIGH PINES



Francis Rogerson



John Nash



Barbara McClosky, Bill Ellison



John Foster, Joseph Lund

The Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Duxbury Beach Association are attempting to protect the area shown at right from disturbance at high tide from July through October when shorebirds are migrating through this area. They do so in the belief that this sanctuary will contribute measurably to the conservation of shorebirds.

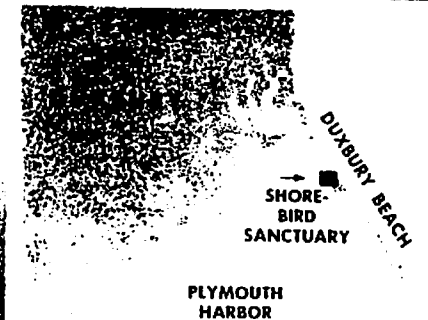
Shorebirds present throughout the summer, sometimes in large numbers, include the semipalmated plover, black-bellied plover, ruddy turnstone, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, knot, least sandpiper, dunlin, short-billed dowitcher, semipalmated sandpiper and sanderling.

Shorebirds of regular occurrence in small numbers are the piping plover, golden plover, whimbrel, spotted sandpiper, stilt sandpiper, willet, pectoral sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, western sandpiper and Hudsonian godwit.

Joseph Lund chairs the committee who are supervising the project. Other members and Mrs. Donald Bischoff and Peter Richards of Duxbury and Edward Burgess and William Brewster of Plymouth.



Charles Eaton III, Charles Eaton IV



Mr. Lund and volunteers posted about forty signs in the area last Saturday morning. In the group were Francis Rogerson, Jr., chairman of the Duxbury Conservation Commission; William Ellison, Barbara McClosky, John Nash, Charles Eaton III, Bobbie and John Cutler, Dr. Corwin Fleming, Michael Schofield, and a member of the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Thousands of shorebirds stop at coastal beaches in summer to rest and eat before continuing their flight to southern wintering grounds. Our beaches have become so crowded by summer visitors that even humans have difficulty finding space for an outing. Human crowding leaves the shorebirds no room on the beach at high tide when the mudflats they feed on are covered by high water.

The Duxbury Beach Association, the Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Duxbury Summer Science program are working together this summer on a program that may have great value shorebirds and keep these interesting birds in the area for people to see and enjoy.

The Beach Association has authorized the Audubon Society to post as a sanctuary the area north of High Pines on the bay side of Duxbury Beach to reduce human use of the marsh and panhandle lying westerly of the tidal creek. In this area, thousands of shorebirds rest at high tide. To humans, it is the least desirable sector of the entire beach complex. It is hoped that, if disturbance is kept to a minimum, the shorebirds will benefit.

The Society has installed signs on the beach with the help of the Duxbury Summer Science Program. The Duxbury Committee will patrol the area at high tide from July 10 to September 10 on weekends and holidays. If the necessity arises, weekday patrols may be tried.

The program is a new experiment. It may provide information for researchers for the Federal Government who are studying coastal marshes from Maine to the Carolinas for answers that may aid these interesting birds of passage. It is another step in helping man maintain quality in his environment and prolonging his enjoyment of wildlife.

Shorebirds are different. Most of us have an idea about what birds are and what birds do. Shorebirds rarely fit any of these rule-of-thumb definitions. To begin, shorebirds are a diverse lot. The group includes sandpipers and plovers, ranging in size from sparrows to larger than robins. These birds do not eat grain nor glean insects from tree tops. They live by searching sand or mud for small animals, such as worms and sand fleas and other forms of life that few of us know exist. Shorebirds seldom come in contact with men or man's world - most persons know them only as those quick, little birds that they see running ahead of the waves along the beach. But shorebirds reflect the greatest beauty when in flight. A flock of shorebirds flashing in the sun - darting and dodging in unison with the uniformity of a school of fish - becomes a symphony in motion.

Shorebirds are different too in their migration habits. After a long flight from South America, many shorebirds pass through Massachusetts in late May and early June. Shortly after the eggs are hatched, the adults leave the young to fend for themselves on their Arctic breeding grounds, and head south. It is the adults then who arrive first along our coast on their southward journey in July.

Shorebirds need places to feed, which often cover hundreds of acres at low tide, but also they need places to gather at high tide to sleep, loaf and preen. Shorebirds appear to confine their visits to traditional stopping places every year. For example, apparently attractive sandy shallows on Martha's Vineyard get very little use, while similar places on Monomoy get heavy use for reasons we do not understand.

Although such areas may be small, it appears likely that they may be critically important to these birds, and thus represent a conservation problem of sufficient importance to warrant measures designed to protect the known shorebird loafing sites (the places shorebirds actually use now) from unnecessary disturbance.

One such place is the stony island off High Pines on Duxbury Beach.

Many shorebirds in autumn migration - which begins in July for several shorebird species - fly southeast from their Canadian breeding grounds crossing a rather narrow zone of northeastern United States and Maritime Canada, on over the western Atlantic to South America. Apparently many take off from places northwest of New England and fly over us non-stop. Thousands of others, however, stop along the sand and mudflats between Nova Scotia and Delaware Bay. The reasons for the transcontinental eastward flight are clear on a globe; it is the shortest route from Arctic Canada to South America.

The autumn shorebird migration begins in early July, reaches its greatest peak in early August, and again a smaller peak in early September, and continues into late October. Thus, the great peak of shorebird migration occurs during the peak use of coastal areas by vacationers. The pressure of use by people

of every beach, island and even salt marsh, is now so great as to warrant concern that disturbance of shorebirds on migration may adversely affect a large part of the North American shorebird population, and is thus a serious potential hazard to their survival. Many shorebirds must fly thousands of miles over open ocean and if disturbance forces them to take off with inadequate fuel and rest, they have little chance of making a successful flight.